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SUBJECT: KRG RAMPS UP CHECK POINTS AROUND QANDIL; IMPACT
UNCLEAR

Classified By: Classified By Jess Baily, Regional Coordinator for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 4, RRT Erbil DTL visited five Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) checkpoints leading toward known PKK areas in the Qandil Mountains. Local security officials have reinforced efforts to control the flow of goods and people to the PKK by adding new checkpoints and increasing personnel at existing checkpoints. Officials said they took such steps beginning November 3 on the orders of their superiors. Other actions, such as blocking unpaved trails, would follow. Expressing no sympathy for the PKK, local Asayish (internal security) director stressed that the PKK was hurting the region's interests. What is less clear is the impact of such measures. Asayish director noted that the PKK has links in Iran and may just turn toward Iran to replace any supplies no longer moving north from KRG territory. Declining to pass judgment on the effectiveness of such efforts, RRT DTL stressed the importance of sustaining these efforts in order to isolate the PKK and show the public (and Turkey) what they are doing. End Summary.

¶2. (C) KRG Minister of Interior Karim Sinjari organized a visit on November 4 to allow RRT staff (RRT DTL, ARSO and RSO LES) to see the new measures to isolate the PKK. A committee chaired by PM Nechirvan Barzani decided November 1 to take steps to disrupt the movement of people and goods to the PKK; implementation reportedly began November 3. Sinjari chose the site of the RRT's visit: the areas north of Lake Dukan leading to the Qandil Mountains in the north, where the PKK has its main bases. The high mountains and rough terrain make the area difficult for any law enforcement authority to control. The director of Ranya Asayish Haider Hajji Tany led RRT group along the road north of Lake Dukan from the town of Ranya toward the east. The first check point, at a narrow passage between the mountains east of Ranya and Lake Dukan, had the most vehicular traffic in the area. Officials said that they had doubled the number of Asayish forces at the check point from 6 to 15 and increased the questioning of drivers, particularly truckers carrying food and other staples. LES noted that the quality of personnel was higher than at normal checkpoints in the region.

¶3. (C) Proceeding and then turning on a road leading north toward the mountains, RRT staff stopped at a checkpoint on a road that led directly to known PKK camps and about 30 villages in high, mountainous terrain. According to officials, a small PKK outpost (manned by two or three people) stood about five kilometers away. The checkpoint, staffed with 20 Asayish personnel, is one that journalists often used to visit PKK. Haider said the journalists were now being turned away. He added that they were paying close attention to foodstuff deliveries and were checking amounts against the rations delivered to the estimated 6,000 villagers. (Note: it is unclear how this vetting process worked.) Haider said that, if necessary, they could add

personnel to the site. He also emphasized that the villagers were cooperating in giving the Asayish information about the PKK.

¶4. (C) The third checkpoint had just been established on the morning of November 3. Lying on a road leading north toward the Iranian border, it consisted of several barriers with tents for the security personnel; an Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement post lay two kilometers further up the road. Haider said the idea was to build a more permanent check point in the near future. The visit continued north of the town of Qalat Dizah on a road lined with vendors selling smuggled Iranian fuel. Haider explained that this was not a known PKK supply route, but the Asayish had established a new checkpoint next to a local Peshmerga post in case the PKK began to use it as an alternative. The final check point was another newly established one, northwest of the town of Ranya.

¶5. (C) The local security officials noted repeatedly that they were working on a new set of orders from above, and expressed no sympathy for the PKK. "They are working against our national interests," Haider said, "and we want them to leave." RRT DTL declined a request to pass judgment on the effectiveness of the new measures, noting that the local Asayish were the experts. He did stress, however, the importance of keeping up the pressure over time. It is not just a matter of adding new sites or personnel; they need to block the flow of goods and people to the PKK and show the public in Iraq and Turkey the results of their efforts.

¶6. (C) Comment: Local security officials in Ranya were clearly marching to a new set of orders to block PKK supply routes. Two of the check points had been established in the past two days, and all checkpoints had increased personnel.

BAGHDAD 00003663 002 OF 002

Without a baseline, however, it is impossible for RRT personnel to judge the extent and effectiveness of such measures. The proof will come over time. In the meantime, the USG needs to maintain pressure on regional authorities to isolate PKK, disrupt their supply routes and arrest their leaders. It is also crucial to encourage them to let the public in Iraq, Turkey and beyond see proof of their determination to take concrete steps against the PKK. We recognize that these checkpoints near the Iranian border may not be the ones about which Turkey is most concerned, such as the Zap camp near the Turkish border. As security permits, we will also endeavour to verify checkpoint activity in that area. End Comment.

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